BY KAYLA PLATT AND CAROLINE JUDY

# REGIONAL RENEWABLE ENERGY PROCUREMENT

## Power through partnerships

Many of us in local government have been talking about regional partnerships as a way of reducing the cost of services, but are we really willing to "walk the talk"? Cities and counties that try to collaborate often run into challenges with governance or legal requirements. Or the agencies simply run out of energy and enthusiasm before results can be delivered.

Yet quietly and often successfully, there is one area of local government where collaboration is working: procurement. While many communities partner to piggyback off of each other's procurement contracts for goods and services, Alameda County, California, is using a model of collaborative procurement to help other public agencies develop renewable energy projects on public facilities.

Under the Regional Renewable Energy Procurement Project (R-REP), the county is leading the procurement process for 20 to 30 participating Bay Area agencies in Alameda, Contra Costa, San Mateo, and Santa Clara counties. The R-REP is projected to include more than 190 sites for a total of up to 50 megawatts of power. A technical adviser will then group these sites into bid bundles based upon type of technology, size, location, and site characteristics.

In addition to lowering energy costs for participating agencies and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, the regional economy will also get a boost, as renewable energy projects are initiated simultaneously. The R-REP is projected to generate more than 600 jobs and $200 million in economic activity.

Alameda County is directing the procurement in partnership with two regional public/private entities. To date, the group has focused on outreach and education to encourage participation. The next step for participating agencies is to complete professional site assessments to determine the feasibility of each project. Issuance of a request for proposal is planned for fall 2012.

This project is an expansion of the Silicon Valley Collaborative Renewable Energy Procurement Project (SV-REP), under which nine Bay Area public agencies in two counties developed solar projects at 70 sites. Through collaboration, these agencies were able to:

- Conserve funds and staff time (saved 75 to 90 percent in administrative costs and time).
- Achieve volume discounts and receive competitive bids (prices were 10 to 15 percent lower than going it alone).
- Benefit from standardized procurement documents and process.
- Receive competitive bids for individual sites that might otherwise not have been attractive to vendors.
- Accelerate deployment of projects.
- Use experiences within the collaboration through the procurement process.

### Keys to Success: Commitment and Guidance

Following a best practice model developed by key SV-REP stakeholders has contributed to the success of the R-REP. This step-by-step model for collaborative procurement is defined in *Purchasing Power: Best Practices Guide to Collaborative Solar Procurement* (www.jointventure.org/purchasingpower), which was published after the conclusion of the SV-REP. This publication provides valuable guidance to any agency interested in collaborative procurement.

Marketing the initiative and attracting interest among agencies was made easier by pointing to the success of this model in saving the SV-REP participants time and money. More than 95 percent of the SV-REP projects have been completed to date, and the remaining projects are in progress.

There is also continuity between the R-REP and the SV-REP. Joint Venture Silicon Valley Network, a nonprofit organization based in San Jose, functioned as the convener in the SV-REP and is performing the same function in the larger, regional project.

A regional collaboration requires many champions. A partnership was originally formed between Alameda County, as lead agency, and Joint Venture Silicon Valley Network, as project convener. To expand the project to a regional effort, the Contra Costa Economic Partnership was engaged as a second convener. These two trusted, nonprofit organizations lend credibility to the project and play an important role in performing outreach to agencies in their respective geographic areas.

The commitment of senior-level staff at the lead agency and adequate time devoted to the project by other lead agency staff is critical. A champion at each participating agency is necessary too. For these individuals, the benefits of collaboration extend beyond saving time and money. They receive support from the lead agency, conveners, and technical advisers to navigate the complexities of renewable energy procurement and to assist with obtaining buy-in from key decision-makers within their own organizations.

Another recommended best practice for a collaboration of this size is to form a leadership team with representatives from outside agencies and individuals

*Continued on page 26*

*Regional Energy, continued from page 25*

with deep knowledge of the technical aspects of renewable energy projects. Convening such a group once a month has contributed immensely to the success of the R-REP.

## Easily Replicated

The collaborative model for renewable energy procurement can easily be replicated by other regions. Its success has been proven not only by the SV-REP, but also by several other jurisdictions around the country that are using the model.

To start a collaborative, it takes only a motivated organization ready to engage others. In turn, participants will save time and money in the procurement process, and reduce both their operating costs and greenhouse gas emissions as a result of project development. The lead agency that makes the resource investment in the procurement process benefits from the collaborative as well.

Collaborative procurement is one way that local governments are changing the way we do the business of government. PM


**CAROLINE JUDY** is assistant director (caroline.judy@acgov.org) and **KAYLA PLATT** is renewable energy associate/AmeriCorps Member (kayla.platt@acgov.org), General Services Agency, Alameda County, California.